successful bidder. During the intervening period, capacity of 4.5 Million GSM equipment was ordered on existing vendors to meet expansion needs to a limited extent.

Laying of submarine cable

464. SHRI DHARAM PAL SABHARWAL: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether BSNL and MTNL are planning to lay submarine cable links from India to Singapore and Malaysia and another through West Asia to be extended upto US and Europe;

(b) if so, the details in this regard with the cost of the project;

(c) whether the cost of the project is four times more than the actual cost according to DoT estimates:

(d) the names of consultants for the project and the criteria adopted in selection of consultants;

(e) whether BSNL/MTNL is considering alternative plans for the cable links in view of heavy cost; and

(f) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. Millennium Telecom Limited (MTL), a joint venture of MTNL and BSNL has planned to lay its own Submarine cable from the Indian East Coast to South-East Asia and from Indian West Coast to Middle East with an aim for onward connectivity to the Europe and North America through existing and newly planned Submarine Cables.

The Eastern segment has been planned from India to Malaysia and/or Singapore with branches to Bangladesh, Myanmar, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Thailand and Indonesia. The Western segment has been planned from India to United Arab Emirates and/or Saudi Arabia with possible branches to Pakistan, Oman, Iran, Qatar and Kuwait.

As per the Preliminary estimates worked out by M/s Datawave Ltd., the Phase-I consultant to examine feasibility/viability of the project and Return on Investment, the estimated cost of the project is US $ 400 million excluding terminal build etc.

(c) to (f) M/s Datawave Ltd. of United Kingdom was appointed as Phase-I consultant to examine feasibility/viability of the project and Return on Investment. M/s Axiom of France has been appointed as Phase-II consultant for providing assistance to MTL team till the completion of the project. Both these consultants have been selected through open global bidding process.

The above preliminary cost is only an estimate and shall be firmed up after tenders are finalized. However, the possibility of a land route to Singapore *via* Myanmar is also being explored.